

# bmj.com news roundup

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## NHS safety agency issues guidance on nasogastric tubes

New NHS safety advice has been issued on reducing the harm caused by nasogastric feeding tubes that have been wrongly inserted. The alert, from the National Patient Safety Agency, follows 11 deaths of patients in the past two years, including that of one child.

A further 13 incidents have also been reported, one of which caused serious harm to the patient. The agency said this week that it was concerned that unreliable tests were being used to check whether a tube had been inserted correctly.

The agency issued a list of recommended tests including measuring the acidity/alkalinity of aspirate (stomach contents) using pH indicator strips in the range 0 to 6 with half point gradations; testing the aspirate should not be done with blue litmus paper. Radiography is recommended for intensive care patients or neonates, but should not be used routinely.

The agency emphasised that several tests still in use should be stopped immediately. This included the "whoosh" test, which involves the use of a syringe to push a small volume of air down the tube while the sounds produced are monitored with a stethoscope.

Rebecca Coombes *London*

Further information is available at [www.npsa.nhs.uk](http://www.npsa.nhs.uk)

## New cholera vaccine is effective among people with HIV

A new, orally administered cholera vaccine has been shown to be effective against clinically significant cholera in an urban sub-Saharan population with a high prevalence of HIV infection.

The results offer one of the best possibilities for improved control of cholera, even among HIV infected people, who may



## US jury finds that antidepressant did not cause boy to kill his grandparents

A jury has rejected a claim that the antidepressant sertraline caused a boy to kill his grandparents with a shotgun.

Christopher Pittman (above) was aged 12 in November 2001 when he shot his grandparents in the head as they slept. He was tried as an adult in Charleston, South Carolina, and was sentenced last week to 30 years' imprisonment.

Prosecutors said Christopher shot his grandparents after they punished him for getting into a fight on a school bus. Their key psychiatric expert, Dr James Ballenger, testified that Christopher killed out of anger. Dr Pamela Crawford, a forensic psychiatrist, said Christopher had a conduct disorder and that he should be held responsible for his actions.

Medical experts called by the defence told jurors that Christopher developed akathisia, emotional blunting, and mania or psychosis as a result of taking sertraline (marketed as Zoloft in the United States and Lustral in the United Kingdom). They argued that Christopher did not know right from wrong. But the jurors disagreed.

After the verdict Pfizer said: "Zoloft didn't cause his problems, nor did the medication drive him to commit murder."

The defence plans to appeal.

Jason Cato *Charleston*

Jason Cato is a reporter for the *Herald* in Rock Hill, South Carolina.

not respond well to other cholera vaccines.

The results come from an evaluation in Beira, Mozambique—a city where the seroprevalence of HIV is 20% to 30%—of a mass immunisation programme with an oral cholera vaccine consisting of recombinant cholera toxin B subunit and killed whole cells (the rBS-WC vaccine) (*New England Journal of Medicine* 2005;352:757-67). The World Health Organization recently recommended that this and other new generation cholera vaccines be considered in certain areas.

The rBS-WC vaccine and its predecessor, the BS-WC vaccine, which contained chemically extracted rather than recombinant cholera toxin B subunit, have already been shown in studies to be safe and protective in settings where cholera is endemic but without a high prevalence of HIV infection (*Lancet* 1990;335:270-3).

In the present investigation one or more doses of rBS-WC resulted in 78% protection against cholera infection (95% confidence interval 39% to 92%;  $P=0.004$ ).

Scott Gottlieb *New York*

## Sharp rise in deaths in South Africa is largely due to AIDS

New statistics from the South African government show a 57% increase in the number of deaths between 1997 and 2002. Government statisticians believe that a large proportion of the increase is attributable to AIDS.

The figures have been produced by the country's statistician general, Pali Lehohla, whose own job is said to be under threat over a series of blunders in other statistical reports. Her position is thought to have been weakened further because this latest report is likely to embarrass President Thabo Mbeki, who has been ambivalent about dealing with the HIV and AIDS epidemic.

In people over 15 years old deaths increased by 62% over the period. The age group with the largest increase was 30 to 34 year olds, in whom the number of deaths more than doubled, from 18 903 to 46 758. A sharp increase over the same period also occurred in children aged under 4 years old, from 34 779 to 48 572 deaths.

Ms Lehohla said the data "provided indirect evidence that the HIV epidemic in South Africa is raising the mortality levels of prime aged adults, in that associated diseases are on the increase."

Pat Sidley *Johannesburg*

*Mortality and Causes of Death in South Africa, 1997-2003* is available at [www.statssa.gov.za](http://www.statssa.gov.za)

## Restraint should be last resort for violent behaviour

Rapid tranquillisation and physical restraint should be considered for use in patients with disturbed or violent behaviour only when other strategies have failed, say guidelines published this week for the NHS in England and Wales.

The guidance recommends that all mental health service providers should have a full risk